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THE RELATION OF VISITING NURSES TO PUBLIC PHILANTHROPIES

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THE interrelation of the different phases of philanthropic work has been recognized and used as a working basis only within comparatively recent years.

The value of this interrelation is by no means universally appreciated. There is still Lady Bountiful, who distributes her gifts with gracious unconcern; there is the man who measures his benevolence by the amount he gives, often also by the indiscrimination of the method, and there is the appalling body of men and women who have not yet begun to look at the educators for help in solving many of the questions regarding the dependency and inefficiency of applicants for charity and their low standards of life and work.

All these influences tend to isolate philanthropic effort, to dissociate temporary relief from the attempt to make conditions permanently better, and to place the individual's interests before those of society. Social workers in general do consider that whatever specialization may be necessary, a broader view of the field and a more intimate acquaintance with other methods and aims are essential if a proper balance between various branches is to be maintained.

It is for some such reason as this that the National Conference of Charities and Correction holds its annual meeting, calling together persons interested in all varieties of philanthropic work. Each department of public charity is represented by a committee, which meets in general assembly, where its work is discussed in its relation to other departments, and which also has its own particular session, giving opportunity to the delegates to take up special problems, to plan new methods, to dust off the cobwebs of routine, and get a clearer view of needs and possibilities of work.

Heretofore district nursing has not been represented by a committee, but has merely contributed a report or paper in the general discussion. This year it will take its place with other representatives, and though its share in the proceedings will be a modest one, its delegates will have the opportunity not only to compare the scope and methods of the different bodies of visiting nurses, but to relate at close range its activities to those of other agencies for social betterment.

District nursing means, primarily, care of the sick poor in their homes, and as a medium of relief pure and simple it has its place. If,

however, it meant nothing more, if with all the skill of hand, the technical knowledge, and the resourcefulness brought to bear by the nurse, she did not give her work the educational emphasis, if she did not appreciate conditions and their causes, she would fall far short of the highest possibilities.

A nurse particularly runs the risk of overestimating the individual's claims and needs because professionally she sinks herself in her patient to such an extent. His wants, his weakness, his dangers, are absorbing, and when he feels the strength of her skill he shifts the responsibility even of living on her shoulders, and she must act for him till she can help him to take up the burden for himself again.

It is true that the visiting nurse has so much variety in her day that her interests are divided, her calls are not equally serious, and her sense of humor relieves the depression, but still her work *per se* is so absorbing both to mind and body that it is sometimes difficult to see beyond it or to weave into it a bigger purpose than the immediate care of the sick body. A nurse has opportunities that come to no other friendly visitor. Her relations with the family are simple and natural. She comes because of definite need which she can definitely relieve.

In the case of the unworthy, "the rounders," they rarely feel towards her as they may towards a representative of other charitable agencies, that the amount she will give depends upon their show of need, and, on the other hand, the self-respecting poor will allow her to know and help because of the friendly relation. She learns as a friendly neighbor learns that small Mary is at home from school because her only frock is at the pawnshop, that the babies are in bed because the last shovel of coal has been burned, or that the family is being tided over a hard season by the little bit "put by" in the bank, or by insurance money saved from the undertaker's grasp after the death of the chief wage-earner.

So much for her coöperation with the societies for direct relief. She can learn the real needs and tell the possibilities of self-help without direct investigation, and because she is outside can perhaps be a more effective assistant.

Her association with other social agencies is even more important. She finds the child out of school because he is crippled, blind, or mentally defective, and growing up to be a burden, if not a menace, to the family and the community. Because her friendliness is generally unquestioned, she can put the parents in touch with the institution or individuals who are ready to give the needed opportunity, and can often remove the prejudice that would deprive the child of his right to be helped.

The amount of any person's usefulness is generally in direct proportion to his or her interest. To be informed upon the vital economic questions of the day is to have opinions, and to have and express opinions is to a certain extent to win listeners and adherents. The questions of child labor, of living and housing in the crowded districts, the problems confronting educators of the adjustment and modification of the public-school curriculum, the discussions on the prevention of disease and the lessening of crime, can hope for a solution only when public interest is aroused.

The nurse shares with other social workers the opportunity for coöperation in the direct work of remedying existing conditions by the enforcement of present laws, and in forming public opinion to demand better and more effective legislation. If she can give back to a child-laborer his right to a fair education, or, still further, an opportunity to fit himself for some real, self-respecting work, if, through her agency, his home is made more decent and sanitary, she has but gone on with the task she begun when she helped him up from serious illness to face life and its burdens. We have no right to confine our work to technical lines. We have no right to go into these families and give only our skill—to touch their lives and leave no trace except relief from pain or the healing of wounds.

The help that we can give along the direct lines of our own work is more self-evident. Hospitals and dispensaries represent gloom and death to many persons, partly through ignorance, and partly through the unfortunate and inexcusable attitude of the subordinate officials in many institutions towards the poor whom they claim to serve. The awe felt towards the door-boy, clerk, and orderly we can, unhappily, do little to overcome, since we also feel their superiority and are withered by their scorn unless we shine in the reflected glory of their gods; but we can demonstrate the value of hospital and dispensary care, not only in acute illness, but even more in cases of defective vision, defective hearing, deformities, and chronic disease—all incapacitating the patient for useful work, but being endured because the measures for relief are not understood.

Education of the patient and the family should go hand-in-hand with the nursing care. If the nurse can teach the mother to give the sick child fresh air, to keep the bed and the person clean, and to appreciate the value of regularity in feeding, she has effected something; but if she can win for the child in health an appreciation of his right to proper food and clothing, to activities, to work and play and sleep and sunshine, she has done more. Remedies for an actual ill are easier to remember than preventives for a possible one, even when it has come

so often that it may be numbered with the possibilities, or almost with the certainties.

In the spread of contagion and the treatment of infectious diseases, more especially of tuberculosis, the nurse can supplement the other agencies which are working so earnestly and well to educate the people.

Isolation is narrowing. We are helped out of routine and stimulated to rekindled interest by coöperation with others who are sharing our particular work. But as a body of specialists we need to come into contact with other phases of the social problem, to admit the conception that there may be better methods than our own of accomplishing a desired end, and to see the place that our work holds in the general scheme.

Such an opportunity is offered by the conference to be held in Portland, Ore., during the week of July 15 to 22. Railroad rates were given last month and will be printed again in a later issue.

A NEW CRANFORD: BEING A MORE OR LESS TRUE ACCOUNT OF AN EXPERIMENT

**DEDICATED TO OUR DEAR J. B., WHO OF ALL OTHERS BEST
UNDERSTANDS WHAT PROMPTED ITS UNDERTAKING**

BY ISABEL McISAAC

Late Superintendent of the Illinois Training-School, Chicago

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VI. WINTER IN THE COUNTRY

ONE of the most frequent questions asked us about living in the country is as to the loneliness and isolation in winter.

To persons who are dependent upon having many people about them and have no resources within themselves, winter in the country would be a terrible affliction, but when one is as busy as the proverbial bee and has a telephone, rural mail delivery, and a daily paper, besides two busy towns to look at, even if one is not in them, the days are very full and there is no time for loneliness.

The simple daily needs are much more difficult and require far more time and steps; the one item of water alone is a constant battle with frozen pumps and drains, and when the howling winter winds come raging across the frozen lake the fires will not stand any neglect, and